

Oak Street
NCLASSIFIED

MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE BULLETIN

VOL. XI

NO. 2

The Inner Life of a College

By

PRESIDENT JOHN M. THOMAS

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT
OCTOBER
1916

Published by the College September, October, November, December, January, February, April, and July. Entered as second class matter at the postoffice, Middlebury, Vermont, under Act of Congress of July 16, 1894.

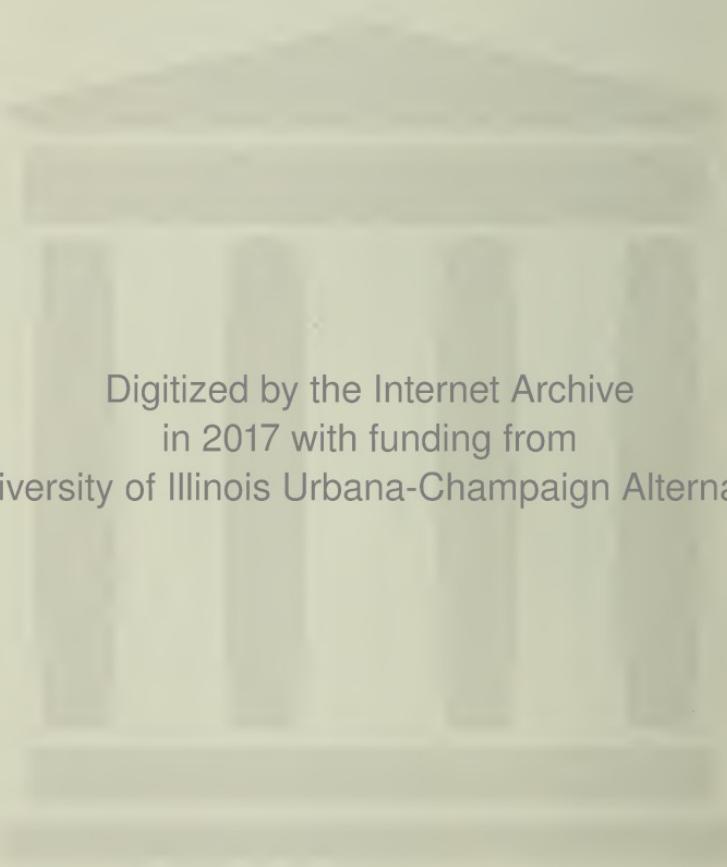
The Inner Life of a College

AN ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF THE ONE
HUNDRED AND SEVENTEENTH YEAR
OF MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

By President John M. Thomas

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT

1916

A faint, light-colored illustration of a classical building's facade, featuring four tall, fluted columns supporting a triangular pediment. The building is set against a dark, textured background.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Alternates

<https://archive.org/details/innerlifeofcolle00thom>

THE INNER LIFE OF A COLLEGE.

At the opening of the 117th year of Middlebury College and at this first student assembly in this stately and beautiful chapel, whose dignity and impressiveness must move us all to serious and earnest thought, I wish to sound a note of progress in the things which make up the inner life of a college. What shall it profit us if we gain magnificent buildings and rich endowments, and boast a wide domain of primeval forest, if we lose that spirit of high ambition and academic earnestness which has been all our glory in the great days of the past? Silas Wright and Solomon Foote, Edward J. Phelps and John G. Saxe, Henry Norman Hudson and Albert Hurd, and Stewart and Kellogg and Brainerd and Mead and Hepburn came not from marble halls and from dormitories with rooms with bath, but from great teachers, like Nathaniel Chipman and John Hough and Solomon Stoddard and Charles B. Adams and George N. Boardman, and from a resolute purpose on their own part to master Greek tragedy, and to know Shakespeare, and to grip the problems of Calculus.

Since the centennial of our college in 1900 the institution has gone forward in all material ways by leaps and bounds. At that time there was only the old stone row, dignified, well-proportioned, wrapt in

time's incomparable beauty, but plain in all their appointments and limited in their facilities both for student life and academic pursuits. In that centennial year the old college was flanked by the Egbert Starr Library, still the gem of all our college structures, and year after year hall and residence and laboratory have been added until few of us could tell off-hand how many college buildings we have. It depends upon where in our spacious campuses you stop and what kind of buildings you include. Including residences we have 22 college buildings, and the newest of them exceeds both in cost and capacity all three of the old buildings which were the only home the college acquired for itself in the first 100 years of its history.

In 1900 Middlebury College had 123 students. This year with the summer session our catalogue will show well over 500. Then our faculty numbered 10: now we have 32 instructors. Then our endowments were \$400,000. We have today half again as much. Then we offered 106 term courses: now we are giving 217 semester courses. Then the college was spending less than \$25,000 annually for its students: the last Treasurer's report shows an expenditure of \$91,500.

We have a right to pride in this record and it is proper we should put the facts forcibly before the public. The people of Vermont do not yet realize the advance that has been made by Middlebury College in the first sixteen years of its second century. They do not yet appreciate the advantages we offer:

for example, that we have one of the best series of chemical laboratories to be found in America, with more courses than are given in many institutions which bestow ambitious degrees in chemical engineering; nor that our Department of Pedagogy is in some respects the best practical normal school for high school teachers to be found in New England. Surprise as well as admiration is expressed by every visitor to this Mead Memorial Chapel and by every one who examines the facilities and equipment of Hepburn Hall and looks off on the mountains from its windows. They had not imagined that such structures had been erected for any college in Vermont.

I trust we have not finished our material expansion. We sadly need an infirmary and an endowment to sustain it, so that students becoming ill may be cared for without danger or inconvenience to others. A college of 350 students, 30 miles from a hospital, with no provision for caring for the sick, is certainly not suitably equipped. I hope some day we may have a college boat-house, with concrete foundations sufficient to withstand the spring freshets, so that we may take advantage of our beautiful river, which is as well adapted to boating as the Thames at Oxford. Much more serious is the need of proper provision for administrative offices. One office has been added to another wherever room at the time was available until they are now scattered in three different buildings and on six different floors, at great inconvenience to both officers and students. We could

work at a far greater efficiency if we could bring these offices together on one or two floors. The old chapel ought always to be the administrative center of the college. There would be room there for sufficient offices if we could have either a building devoted to History, Economics and Political Science, or a hall for the ancient and modern languages—departments which are already too crowded in the old chapel building—allowing the use of present recitation rooms there for administrative purposes. Since the library was erected, this chapel is the only structure which has been given to us which stands for the human or spiritual side of college work. We have built new homes for the sciences, for Biology and Chemistry and Physics, and three or four student residences, and a gymnasium and a heating plant and a grand-stand, but we teach Homer and Horace, History and Government in the same rooms in which my father learned them over fifty years ago. It is time we built a little for the humanities, for which we profess especially to stand.

But I propose that we hope for these needed additions on the principle stated in the text, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you." If we are worthy of them, from the high quality and serious earnestness of our work as an institution for education, they will come to us. If we are not worthy of them, because of the laxity of our student work, we ought not to expect them. At any rate I am persuaded the time has come for us in Middlebury College to stress internal improvement

and to give our best thought both as teachers and students to means to improve the quality of our academic life.

The effort should not be all on the student side, and I think I can assure you that it is not. I know there is a serious searching of heart on the part of each member of the instructing staff, especially at the beginning of each college year, as to how his work may be made more effective, more really gripping on the student mind. It may be there should be closer co-operation between members of the faculty, better team-work, as some of you might put it. There may be waste of time in going over the same ground in different classrooms and laboratories. Courses in the literatures of England, America, Germany and France deal with the same periods, the same movements of thought, and the same literary forms, and there may easily be repetition and consequent waste of time. The same broad human facts and truths are considered under different aspects in the departments of History and Philosophy, of Economics and Political Science, and I do not doubt if instructors knew more accurately the work of other classrooms than their own—and I have suggested only a few of the possibilities of overlapping and omission—much improvement could be made and the curriculum as a whole notably strengthened. Much of the method in the natural and physical sciences is common to them all, and it has often been suggested that it would be possible to work out a course in general science that would cover

the broad principles of Physics, Biology, Chemistry, and Geology, sufficiently to render one an intelligent citizen of the modern world, and to impart a knowledge and appreciation of scientific method, which after all is the great benefit of scientific study, while at the same time laying a foundation for further special study in any particular department of science. The field of knowledge has grown very wide. Every student is obliged to omit more than one department of study which seems essential to a thorough education. It is our duty to economize the student's time as much as possible, at least to the extent of avoiding duplication. The problem is difficult, but that does not excuse us from an attempt to solve it.

It is also difficult to avoid repetition of some secondary school work in college. Preparation will vary no matter what care may be taken in admission, and what is useless repetition to one may be necessary laying of foundations for another. The goal that must be sought is individual opportunity, freedom for all students at all times to press on toward new knowledge as rapidly as possible. A department which holds able students back by forcing them to traverse again ground they have already covered is hindering the college from its best work. We want to get our students into advanced work as rapidly as possible, without slighting the necessary foundations. It is the advanced courses which are most profitable for them and most agreeable for us, and not a day should be wasted in preliminaries and prerequisites that is not absolutely essential.

There is also need of closer correlation in the matter of grades in the several departments. I am not ignorant, and you do not need to be informed, that a C in some departments is equivalent to a B in others. A scientific marking system has not been invented. No twenty or thirty men can be found who will evaluate scholastic work by the same standards, but I believe we could reach more nearly just and even standards than we have yet attained in Middlebury College.

We should also approach a more consistent estimate of what constitutes a fair amount of work for one-fifth of a student's time. We give three credits for a course three hours a week for a semester, but one does not ordinarily reach Sophomore year before discovering that an hour is not an hour in our college, but varies as one travels from building to building, and even from room to room. Records have been handed me of capable students who were obliged to spend five or six hours for each recitation of one course, work of the sort comparatively easily measured by the hour, while the same student found one hour of study ample for another course taken at the same time.

These are a few of the problems, by no means peculiar to Middlebury College, which are often discussed among us, and to which we might well give attention the coming year. But all questions of grades and credits and curricula are insignificant in comparison with the main topic that fills a teacher's mind as he faces a new year of opportunity. There

is such a thing as inspiring teaching, class-room contact that stirs souls and awakens life and builds men. There are men of quiet, subtle, pervasive influence, who never thrill you, but who refine and purify you, and imbue you with the gentle graces and give you an honor which you never lose for the higher things of life. Such a man for many generations of Middlebury students was William Wells Eaton, Professor of Greek. There are men who seem to know intuitively the common ground between themselves and those beneath them, who keep by instinct on that enticing borderland just beyond the known and not too far within the unknown, never droning over the familiar, never lost in the clouds, but always adding new insights, new visions of truth, while leaving the student with a keen unrest and an earnest resolution to further inquiry. That is great teaching, the teaching not of subjects but of men, teaching full of vitality and power, that builds character and sends men forth themselves to kindle fire upon the earth. In the toil and drag of the common day we are apt to forget the goal, but in a moment like this, on the day of opening of the greatest opportunity our college ever had, it comes clearly before us and we resolve to aspire toward it with all our strength.

But the most inspiring teaching coupled with the wisest administrative methods will fail without earnest student co-operation. And here the difficulty is not in good intentions, but in intelligent, common-sense planning to effect the desired results. No

one comes to college intending to waste his time, or to acquire habits which will handicap him through life, or to leave the place in six months or a year with the stigma of failure. There are enough good purposes and high ideals in this chapel this morning to give us the cleanest, most wholesome, most earnest little college between the two great seas.

What may we do to realize those ideals? In the first place we may see that we do not forget them, but rather strengthen and confirm them from day to day. And here I count much upon our new chapel, with its daily service at an hour when we are not hurried, and the Sunday gathering for consideration of the deeper truths of life. I suggest that we keep this chapel for its proper use, a place of no other associations than those connected with the searching of our hearts in the face of duty. This is not the place for class meetings, or college rallies, or debates, or the practice of college cheers. This is not a church: it is a college chapel. It is not designed to steal any man from the faith of his fathers. Its influence rather should be to strengthen each student in his own religious allegiance. But it is a place where under the influence of holy truth, common to us all, we may each be held to our best and worthiest; and may God grant that so it may prove to us all! Our entrance to this building should mark a new day for the college. We shall be subject hereafter, as we take our places daily in this reverent room, to a new influence, gentle, elusive, mystical, but real and deep and holy, which should refine our ambitions, and

purify our deeds, until unconsciously our manners become more gentle and our lives more pure.

Cardinal Newman once said that one might have a university in tents if only he had great men for its teachers. I have had some experience recently living in a tent and I found it a very poor place in which to study. As a matter of fact a student's success or failure depends not a little upon the place in which he lives. In recent years our facilities for residences of men have been sorely inadequate. The old dormitories were too crowded, and they tempted to confusion instead of quiet. Under the pressure of both numbers and economy fraternity houses have been overcrowded and there has been no central supervision. ~~I~~ think the Carnegie Foundation's report was right that our provision for homes for the men of the college and for social recreation was quite inadequate. I need waste no time in describing the advantages we have now secured in our magnificent Hepburn Hall. But the improved conditions, both social and sanitary, to which the new building invites its occupants, may be also effected, with a little care, in all the other buildings in which the men of the college reside. It is the desire of the Trustees that this be done. They feel that the college is responsible for the way in which its students live, that it is highly inconsistent to provide academic facilities for cultivated gentlemen and allow them to live under conditions in which it is impossible to be gentlemanly. They have therefore requested the faculty to supervise all student residences, including fraternity

houses, prescribing the maximum number of residents and taking all necessary means to secure sanitary living conditions, suitable for men engaged in study. Through its committee on student residences the faculty will undertake to carry out this direction, and I bespeak the co-operation of you all. The motive is the worthiest—to improve the life of the college. There is always some difficulty in picking up a neglected responsibility, but I am sure you will all admit that it is a responsibility which should be faithfully discharged, and I trust the effort may result in the same friendly and helpful relations in student homes that now exist in the classrooms.

I ask also for a more earnest spirit hereafter in academic work. The impression is general that American college students loaf too much and work too little. Mr. Dooley says that when the Freshman comes to college the President says to him,—“And now, my boy, what w'd yez like our learned professors to study for ye?” Mr. Dooley may exaggerate, but he usually approximates the truth. An eight hour day over books, not including recitations, should not be too much. That allows two hours study for each recitation in the week, which is a higher average than we have maintained. No student has a right to be looking for prejudice in his professors who does not do as well as that.

Too few of you wake up to the privilege of collateral reading and independent study. The notion is too general that one must get credit for all that he does. I think the most rewarding work done in any

college is that which is not prescribed, but which some students find a way to for themselves.

We ought to invent some way to save students from undue participation in what are known as "student activities." Athletics are good, and the student paper, and debating, but the man who is loaded up with offices and managerships, instead of being an honor to his fraternity, is an exhibit of individual weakness and of the folly of his misguided friends. I would like to see a rule that no one who has a condition hanging over him should be eligible for a managership or an important committee assignment.

The faculty have fixed definite qualifications for membership in the several classes. For example, one who has less than 24 credits is ranked as a Freshman, though he may have been a year in college. I have never heard those qualifications criticised as too rigid or in any way unfair. I do not believe they are. I want to suggest that hereafter we put them through in all departments of our college life, including those under student control. If a man is a Freshman, let us be honest enough to call him a Freshman, and make him play on the Freshman team, if he plays at all, and wear a Freshman cap, until he earns the right to be called a Sophomore. One thing the faculty can prescribe, and that is the seating in college assemblies. In chapel the seating hereafter will be strictly alphabetically by classes, and as soon as possible seats will be assigned according to the official lists, and the monitors will mark any student absent

unless he is in the place assigned him according to his rank in the Registrar's office, or they will lose their job. You must admit that this is fair and logical and wholesome.

It would also be most helpful if in your own enterprises you held your associates to the same rigid class accounting. There would be fewer Freshman conditions if more than two uncancelled at the beginning of Sophomore year meant a Freshman cap. I would like to see the kind of college spirit that would put this through. It would be one of the most wholesome reforms which could happen. I appeal to you to add your own social sanctions, which I know are very powerful, to the official acts of the college. We do not require too much for admission to any class: I would like to see the whole force of the college behind the just enforcement of those fair requirements.

I appeal also for student co-operation in maintenance of the moral ideals for which Middlebury College ought to stand. There are some matters not mentioned in our laws, which are perhaps best omitted from formal rules, which ought to be taken for granted. In this day when public sentiment is stronger than ever before against the use of intoxicating liquors, when business corporations and warring nations recognize that alcohol in any form or any quantity diminishes efficiency, there should be no toleration for the indulgence in an institution which aims to send forth worthy leaders. If I know it, there will not be.

There is room for improvement in the speech we tolerate about our campus and in our buildings. The use of profanity is usually mere thoughtless imitation. It is one of the easiest of evil practices to avoid, and the man who frees himself from it does more to increase his self-respect and the regard in which others hold him at less cost and personal sacrifice than is the case with any other vice I know. I wish we could find some other name besides "smoker" for an athletic revival meeting. It does not seem quite right for the President of the Union to stand up in this chapel and announce a "smoker." Why not call it a football rally, and omit both the "smoker" and the smoke?

I may not dwell on other phases of morals, positive and negative, which I would be glad to commend to you. I would like to see Middlebury College stand for clean, strong manhood and womanhood, not Pharisaical, not over-conscious of its superiority, but in a simple, natural way studying to avoid all that is unseemly and to attain every virtue that is of good report. I believe the general student sentiment supports such a position and I trust we can bring it more to the front and make it more dominant in our college life.

Let us then start the year with effort to do all we can for a better and worthier Middlebury. As we look about us, we see how much others have done for the growth and progress of the college. But the real progress must be from within and we who are here must attend to it. There have been too many

failures in times past. Just look at the record of the class which left us last June. They entered 102 strong. When it came to Sophomore year there were 88, Junior year 75, and they graduated 60. Every one of those who dropped out represents loss, to themselves and to the college. Some left the ranks because of unavoidable difficulties, but the greater number dropped out for the failure of some teacher to stir their enthusiasm and awaken their ambition at the right moment, and from their own failure to respond to the efforts made in their behalf. Many fatalities might have been avoided by better ordering of our student life, fewer distractions, quieter dormitories, less moving pictures, less "fussing," and a stronger student sentiment in favor of earnest work.

We ought to do a great deal better. We are situated to do better with the class of 1920. Let us put our minds to the problem, and in the quality of our student life effect as notable advance these coming years as our generous benefactors have enabled us to make in the things which show outwardly.

Members of the incoming class: We welcome you to privileges greater than any previous class of this college ever enjoyed. We welcome you also to our problems. You are not received into a perfect institution. We need to become better in many ways. You can do much to help us, by entering sympathetically into our life, by putting a spirit of earnest resolution into your work, and by preserving through all the process of adjustment to our ways those high ideals and worthy purposes which I know are in your

hearts this day. Your success depends upon your knowing what to let go and what to hold fast. In many matters of custom and manner you can afford to do as you are told. In all matters of principle you will do well to stand by your own judgment. Do not be easily discouraged. Many of the best students have the hardest time at the first and overcome the severest obstacles. A college is a world in miniature. If you can succeed here, you can succeed beyond. And you can succeed, and help us to larger success, if you will try hard enough.

I now declare you duly matriculated students of Middlebury College and members of the class of 1920.



3 0112 105847534